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Forty-third session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 473rd MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Monday, 5 October 1992, at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. LANUS (Argentina)

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General debate (continued)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

GENERAL DEBATE (agenda item 4) (A/AC.96/798, A/AC.96/799) (continued)

1. Mr. DUBOIS (Canada) said that, over the years, UNHCR had demonstrated its ability to adapt to changing circumstances. While focusing on its primary task of providing protection for refugees, it had been called upon to play an important role in addressing the human problems pertaining to all displaced persons. Its care and maintenance programmes, which now reached millions of individuals, were additional to its ongoing search for durable solutions for large refugee populations throughout the world.

2. Referring to the establishment of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs in December 1991, he said that, in his Government's view, all efforts of the United Nations family in the humanitarian field should henceforth be organized under the new Department's leadership.

3. A measure of the importance of UNHCR's position among the agencies most concerned with the provision of relief and humanitarian assistance was resource allocation, which, in Canada, as in other countries, was linked to institutional performance. The $33 million so far provided by his country towards UNHCR activities in 1992 amounted to 50 per cent more than Canada's contribution to UNHCR two years previously. Canadians had been profoundly affected by the events in many parts of the world as a result of which vast numbers of people had left or were leaving their countries. There was therefore great pressure for Canadian humanitarian assistance to be conveyed quickly and effectively through organizations which had demonstrated that they could efficiently reach the recipients most in need. Increased danger to field workers, aid fatigue and the limits on the international donor community's finite pool of resources were a threat to his country's responsive capacity. A broader donor base was essential. Referring in that connection to the question of refugee women and children, a topic of central importance to both UNHCR and Canada, he stressed the usefulness of the UNHCR Guidelines on Protection of Refugee Women (EC/SCP/74) and the motivating role of the High Commissioner in that regard. The place that women and children should occupy in the implementation of UNHCR's mandate would not be fully recognized, however, until UNHCR as an organization ensured that the needs of those groups became central to all its programming.

4. UNHCR had responded with dedication and often by innovative methods to the additional pressures created by the need to combine the provision of humanitarian assistance with diplomatic efforts to reduce the threat to refugee populations and with support for peace-keeping operations. UNHCR staff were to be commended for their determination in the cause they served. Yet, with massive operations under way in Yugoslavia, Cambodia, Afghanistan and the Horn of Africa, there might be a danger of UNHCR becoming overstretched. Could it be asked to take the lead in each successive, or indeed concurrent, humanitarian crisis? Both UNHCR and its member States had to adapt to a changing world. The members of the Executive Committee, in particular, should endeavour to give UNHCR clear and realistic policy guidance. They should also ask themselves whether the Executive Committee as constituted was the best vehicle to achieve that purpose in the present troubled times.

5. In that connection, he noted that the strengthening of United Nations machinery for emergency relief was one of the objectives of the movement for the reform of the United Nations. Positioning UNHCR for the challenges ahead, determining its strategic objectives and devising policy priorities together with other United Nations organizations and, in particular, with the Department of Humanitarian Affairs should be matters of top priority on the Committee's agenda. In that regard, Canada had been impressed by the approach described in the present year's Note on International Protection (A/AC.96/799). In a world increasingly characterized by ethnic nationalism and by the break-up of existing States and the emergence of new ones, UNHCR's ability to respond to new types of protection needs would be essential. The UNHCR of tomorrow should have a well-defined vision of its role, as well as the means required in order to achieve its priorities. It should endeavour to build strategic and complementary alliances with others who shared its objectives; it should rely not only on its own capacity, but also on that of its implementing partners and it should be able to monitor closely the efficiency and effectiveness of its programmes. To that end, it should continue to develop sound in-house monitoring and assessment policies and to provide its staff with the necessary training opportunities. Demonstrated performance would be the key and reliable indicators would have to be available so that lessons could be learned from successes and failures. His delegation had listened with interest to the comments made in that connection by the High Commissioner in her opening statement.

6. Canada was keenly aware of the uncertainties which beset humanitarian relief operations, as well as of the management difficulties resulting from unpredictable funding levels. The Canadian International Development Agency had recently offered the services of an independent consultant to undertake a strategic-management review of UNHCR. It was hoped that the exercise, in which UNHCR had fully collaborated, would provide a useful impetus for reflection in such areas as financial and personnel management.

7. Turning to the events of the past year, which had surely set a regrettable record for crises of a hitherto unknown gravity, he paid tribute to United Nations and non-governmental organization personnel who had risked their lives in delivering humanitarian relief and to members of the United Nations peace-keeping forces who had supported those efforts. The casualties had included a member of the Canadian Armed Forces, Sergeant Malcolm Ralph; the world owed a special debt of gratitude to him and to the other fallen peace-keepers. Canadians had been horrified by the tragedy attending the break-up of the former Yugoslavia and found the practice of so-called "ethnic cleansing" entirely unacceptable and repugnant in the extreme. His Government had been deeply gratified by the dedication shown by the High Commissioner and felt confident that she would play a key role in the follow-up to the process that had begun at the London International Conference on Former Yugoslavia. Canada was fully participating in the United Nations system's efforts in the former Yugoslavia. Its humanitarian assistance now totalled more than $25 million; the Canadian peace-keeping contingent would soon number 2,400 and Canada was actively involved in the resumption of the airlift operation to Sarajevo which had recently been interrupted for security reasons. Furthermore, in response to the High Commissioner's appeal for the protection of former

Yugoslavs displaced by the fighting, Canada had announced special immigration measures for some of the persons affected.

8. Turning to the situation in Somalia, he said that Canada took heart from UNHCR's determination to bring relief to the suffering people of that country and particularly noted the innovations being implemented, such as the cross-border operation out of Kenya to forestall population outflows. As part of its contribution to international efforts to bring humanitarian relief to the Somali people, Canada had to date provided more than $20 million and Canadian Forces aircraft were participating in relief flights into the country's interior. A Canadian contingent of 750 peace-keepers would soon be present in Somalia. Canada was also participating in efforts to provide protection for refugee Somalis. Although resettlement outside the region could not be a solution for the more than 1 million displaced Somalis, his Government was endeavouring to accelerate family unification for Somalis who had close relatives in Canada and was working with UNHCR on the provision of resettlement opportunities in Canada for individual Somalis who could not benefit from other solutions. Canada would take an active part in the international meeting on humanitarian relief efforts in Somalia scheduled to take place in Geneva the following week.

9. The broad public support enjoyed by his Government's efforts to assist in bringing relief and protection to refugees in many parts of the world could be maintained only if Canadians remained convinced that policies and programmes for refugees were firmly based on real needs and that resources were being used effectively and efficiently. The time had come to recognize that the worldwide movement of persons who had been displaced for varying reasons, or who had chosen to move, was such that comprehensive approaches had to be developed. It was not possible to build legal walls around the recipient countries, however overburdened they might already be. On the other hand, mass exodus could not be allowed to become a solution for countries wishing to get rid of their minorities. As a traditional country of immigration, Canada considered it essential to ensure that the admission of migrants rested on a sound legal basis and that strategies to help them adapt to their new countries were in place, while complementary strategies were developed to promote tolerance and understanding in receiving societies. The Canadian Parliament was now considering important new immigration legislation which would, inter alia, provide effective management of an immigration programme now covering 250,000 immigrants and refugees each year. The new law would also ensure that negative decisions had real and timely consequences, including removal of persons whose claims were rejected, but were applied within a system which offered fair procedural safeguards for all claimants.

10. In conclusion, he reiterated Canada's support for the positive evolution of UNHCR policies. The collective challenges facing the international community were not likely to diminish in the near future. They must continue to be approached with the clear-sightedness which had become characteristic of UNHCR under the leadership of the present High Commissioner.

11. Ms. FRIGGEBO (Sweden) said that the High Commissioner and her staff were to be commended for the great efforts they had made in the past year. UNHCR's

ability to carry out large and complex operations such as those in the former Yugoslavia was a sign of positive improvements.

12. The refugee problem in the former Yugoslavia, although undoubtedly the greatest refugee problem in Europe since the Second World War, was primarily a European responsibility and should not overshadow the still more difficult refugee situations in other parts of the world, such as Somalia, Mozambique, Liberia and Afghanistan. The regions in question should also be encouraged to shoulder their responsibilities. The vast majority of refugees worldwide were still found in the third world and the major receiving countries included some of the world's least wealthy nations.

13. The Note on International Protection (A/AC.96/799) provided a useful basis for the future development of the overall framework for the Executive Committee's continued work. Her Government attached particular importance to adopting a comprehensive approach with a view to possible preventive action to avoid mass movements of refugees, as well as to the implementation of programmes in the country of origin to facilitate voluntary repatriations. While recognizing the importance of humanitarian diplomacy as an aspect of preventive protection, Sweden considered that special attention should be given to the relationship between human rights and the outbreak of refugee crises. UNHCR had an important role to play in the preparation of the 1993 International Conference on Human Rights.

14. Another matter of great concern to her country was the accession by all States to existing international and regional instruments on refugees and stateless persons. UNHCR's efforts to promote accession were important and deserved support. Emphasizing the especially difficult situation of refugee women and children, she welcomed the first results of the implementation of UNHCR's Guidelines on Protection of Refugee Women (EC/SCP/74), noting, however, that much remained to be done before the Guidelines could be fully implemented. The coordinators for refugee women and children could play and important role in that connection.

15. Endorsing the comments on UNHCR's mandate and competence contained in the Note on International Protection, she drew attention to General Assembly resolution 46/182, which defined the responsibility of the United Nations system as a whole for responding to emergency situations. The task of making the United Nations system more efficient in emergency situations would certainly require cooperation and coordination among all relevant agencies under the leadership of the new Department of Humanitarian Affairs. UNHCR was called upon to play an important role in meeting that challenge. The concept of cross-mandate was particularly interesting in that context and should be applied wherever feasible. Her Government had consistently advocated a clear division of responsibilities between the relevant United Nations and other organizations in order to provide an effective response in complex emergency situations. It was aware of UNHCR's long tradition of cooperation with non-governmental organizations and wished to see other United Nations agencies learning from UNHCR in that field.

16. Sweden, together with some other countries, had always tried to respond to UNHCR's financial needs as far as possible and had steadily increased its contribution over the years. It would certainly remain dedicated to the cause of refugees. However, the need for fair burden-sharing among donors had to be emphasized. To expect only a few countries to carry the major part of the burden was no longer realistic. Donors should provide the High Commissioner with the necessary flexibility in the allocation of funds; earmarked contributions should be avoided as far as possible. In the Sub-Committee on Administrative and Financial Matters, her delegation had proposed an increase in resources within General Programmes. UNHCR had indicated that the Programme Reserve and the Emergency Fund would probably be required for use in Africa in early 1993 and the High Commissioner in her opening statement had highlighted the increasing requirements for voluntary repatriation. Sweden therefore appealed to the members of the Executive Committee to decide on an increase in the Programme Reserve from the proposed 10 per cent to 15 per cent of General Programmes, an increase in the Emergency Fund from $20,000 to $30,000 and an increase in the Voluntary Repatriation Fund from $15,000 to $20,000.

17. In conclusion, she drew attention to the dangerous revival in Europe of tendencies such as chauvinism, xenophobia, racism and anti-semitism and stressed the importance of developing national and international legal instruments and undertaking information activities to counteract discrimination on ethnic grounds.

18. Mr. KHACHADPAI BURUSAPATANA (Thailand) said that, since the ending of the cold war, changes in the scale and complexity of the world refugee situation had brought new challenges to the international community and UNHCR. Recent outbreaks of large-scale emergencies involving refugees and displaced persons had occurred in almost all regions, from South-West Asia, the Persian Gulf and the Horn of Africa to the very heart of Europe, thus placing further demands on the already strained resources of UNHCR, which must be given, the requisite political and financial support to cope with new refugee situations and speed up the search for durable solutions.

19. In that regard, he had welcomed the fact that, in launching 1992 as the year for voluntary repatriaion at the Executive Committee's preceding session, the High Commissioner had stressed that the right to return to one's country must be given as much emphasis as the right to seek asylum abroad. Repatriation was a key to solving refugee problems, particularly when they were characterized by mass flows of asylum-seekers or assumed a migratory character. In the former case, repatriation should take place once the political climate in the country of origin was suitable and, in the latter, once an asylum-seeker had been deemed not to be a refugee. Repatriation of all non-refugees to their countries of origin would not only end the chronic problem of stranded non-refugees, but would relieve first asylum countries of a heavy drain on scarce resources. Countries of origin particularly should promote the return of non-refugees and he commended UNHCR's indispensable and continued monitoring role in that regard. At the same time, conditions in the country of origin must be dealt with; UNHCR and the related United Nations development agencies needed the world community's assistance in improving socio-economic infrastructures in countries of origin so that they might be better able to reabsorb their citizens and avert repeated

outflows. Reintegration assistance was also important and his delegation appreciated the European Community's reintegration assistance programme for Vietnamese returnees, which deserved full international support.

20. With regard to the repatriation of Laotian asylum-seekers from Thailand, all parties to the fifth tripartite meeting had reaffirmed their commitment to implement fully the outline plan, agreed upon at the fourth tripartite meeting, for a phased repatriation and reintegration of Laotians from Thailand to the Lao People's Democratic Republic. That three-year plan stipulated guidelines for the repatriation and reintegration of Laotian refugees from Thailand. Effective implementation would, however, depend primarily on UNHCR's taking care of financial and resource aspects; and, secondly, development assistance programmes should be set up to ensure the smooth reintegration of returnees. Interested non-governmental organizations could play an important supplementary role for that purpose and Thailand was prepared to facilitate any such activities.

21. The Royal Thai Government intended to reduce to one the number of Laotian refugee camps in Thailand; Baan Vinai camp would be closed by the end of 1992 and Chiengkam camp by 1993. He assured all parties concerned that the Thai authorities would cooperate fully with the Laotian authorities to ensure the repatriation programme's success and would not allow any persons or elements to obstruct its implementation.

22. With regard to Vietnamese boat people, his Government remained committed to the Comprehensive Plan of Action for Indo-Chinese Refugees (CPA), adopted in 1989. His delegation thanked all concerned for the resettlement of the pre-cut-off date camp population, numbering some 12,000. An obvious shortcoming of the CPA was, however, in relation to repatriation, the most realistic solution to the possible residual problem of non-refugees. The turnover of voluntary Vietnamese returnees was still low and not commensurate with the number of those deemed non-refugees or screened out. If the discrepancy was allowed to continue, countries such as Thailand would face an endless residual problem of stranded non-refugees. Therefore, UNHCR and all parties concerned should jointly explore alternative means to repatriate all non-refugees according to the procedures provided for in the CPA. His delegation urged UNHCR to convene the CPA Steering Committee in order to review the CPA's implementation and explore ways to accelerate the repatriation of Vietnamese non-refugees. The measures would, of course, include reintegration assistance and other supplementary elements.

23. Since the signature of the Tripartite Memorandum of Understanding in 1991, the repatriation of displaced Cambodians in Thailand had progressed satisfactorily, over 120,000 having returned safely to their homeland. His delegation paid tribute to UNHCR, the United Nations system and all concerned for making that possible and hoped that all Cambodians remaining in camps in Thailand would be repatriated before May 1993 in order to participate in the Cambodian general elections.

24. It was nevertheless imperative for Cambodian refugees to be able to reintegrate into their homeland's economic and social fabric. In that respect, his delegation looked to international support for the necessary reconstruction

and rehabilitation of Cambodia; UNHCR, in collaboration with the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC), international development agencies and non-governmental organizations, had an essential catalytic role in providing reintegration assistance. Thailand would continue to do its utmost with a view to Cambodia's rehabilitation.

25. A further important point in connection with mass refugee influxes was the environmental side-effect on countries of temporary refuge. Thailand, where over 16,000 acres had been devoted to providing temporary shelter, would have to deal alone, after the departure of refugees and displaced persons, with the task of restoring huge areas of deforested land out of its limited resources. His delegation urged UNHCR and the world community to give the matter serious consideration and had been pleased to learn that the issue of refugees and the environment had been included in the agenda for the Executive Committee's current session.

26. His delegation expressed its profound appreciation to all parties concerned, as well as to UNHCR and its staff, for their untiring efforts to mitigate the predicament of refugees and asylum-seekers. He was confident that, given the dedication and the determination of the High Commissioner and her staff and with the full cooperation of all parties concerned, the current problems would become manageable. Thailand, for its part, would continue its humanitarian tradition and fully support the international community's efforts to that end.

27. Mr. WALKER (Australia) said that the past two years had been particularly eventful in international humanitarian affairs. Lessons had been learned from the international community's quick and cohesive response to the large-scale population displacement arising out of the Gulf conflict: conditions of safety had been created in northern Iraq so that the displaced persons could return to their homes quickly. International mechanisms responding to the situation in the former Yugoslavia had focused on more immediate methods than the traditional approach to crises which engendered mass outflows. Since traditional responses which focused on resettlement might facilitate and even add an element of legitimacy to the horrendous practice known as "ethnic cleansing", other solutions were clearly needed. In that and other recent situations, UNHCR had moved away from its traditional role of protecting refugees pursuant to the 1951 Convention. While that task should remain a core function, circumstances had so changed that UNHCR currently needed facilities to deal with daunting numbers of refugees and other displaced persons.

28. The High Commissioner's strategic plan, outlined in 1991, had aimed firstly at improving UNHCR's emergency preparedness and response mechanism, secondly, at pursuing every opportunity for voluntary repatriation and, thirdly, at promoting solutions through preventive measures at the source. The High Commissioner's three-pronged strategy had, moreover, been adopted at the International Meeting on Humanitarian Aid for Victims of the Conflict in the Former Yugoslavia, held in July 1992. The Note on International Protection (A/AC.96/799) was also an important contribution to a long-overdue exchange between countries and UNHCR on the issues that affected the High Commissioner's mandate. Two aspects were particularly significant: the concept of protection

and the idea of temporary protection in other countries in circumstances where the problem could not be contained for the time being. Underlining UNHCR's evolving role, the Secretary-General had entrusted UNHCR, in November 1991, with a special mandate to coordinate United Nations humanitarian assistance to displaced persons on the territories of the former Yugoslavia.

29. In addressing the Executive Committee the previous year, the High Commissioner had called 1992 the year of voluntary repatriation; and in some regions the implied promise had been significantly fulfilled. For example, over 130,000 Cambodians had been repatriated from camps along the Thai-Cambodian border and the peace process in Cambodia was well under way. Australia applauded UNHCR's efforts in that process, as well as the flexibility and initiative shown by UNHCR staff under difficult conditions. Elsewhere in South-East Asia, the implementation of the Comprehensive Plan of Action for Indo-Chinese Refugees reflected an effective humanitarian response to disorderly population outflows. His delegation, like that of Thailand, looked forward to further concerted international action to resolve that problem.

30. In Afghanistan, too, recent developments had led to a dramatic increase in spontaneous voluntary repatriation. Nevertheless, the international community must go on responding to changing assistance needs particularly for food aid, health, sanitation and mine clearance programmes, as well as attending to the needs of some 2 million registered Afghan refugees still in Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran.

31. Similarly encouraging were events such as those in Central America, where the process begun at the International Conference on Central American Refugees (CIREFCA) had provided a valuable model, linking the problems of refugees and displaced persons to the development of a socio-economic infrastructure able to support voluntary repatriation and integration. Perhaps one of CIREFCA's most important achievements was the degree to which national refugee policies had been subordinated to common international objectives and criteria. The focus of projects in the region had shifted to returnees, who currently outnumbered refugees.

32. In contrast, conditions along the Myanmar-Bangladesh border and in the Horn of Africa, especially Somalia, were dire. Over 266,000 Rohingya refugees were currently in Bangladesh in camps where conditions had deteriorated and the mortality rate had risen significantly. Despite the agreement reached between the Governments of Myanmar and Bangladesh in April 1992, full-scale repatriation of those refugees was not yet under way; the Myanmar authorities had refused to accept a United Nations monitoring presence in their country. Australia had urged the Government of Myanmar to facilitate the early and safe return of refugees and hoped the authorities would recognize the usefulness of a United Nations presence for that purpose.

33. In the Horn of Africa, what many would describe as the world's most daunting humanitarian crisis threatened an estimated 23 million people with death from famine or disease. The civil war simmering in the Sudan since 1956 and the deteriorating political situation were compounded by the presence of approximately 1 million persons fleeing conflicts in neighbouring countries and

the existence of a large tent city around Khartoum, housing some 2 million internally displaced Sudanese fleeing drought and conflict. Despite the end of the civil war, ethnic strife still plagued Ethiopia and Djibouti had recently faced increased rebel activity. The peace enjoyed by Kenya was also threatened by the effects of drought and the refugee exodus from its neighbours.

34. In Somalia, the situation was extraordinarily complex and was characterized by drought, famine, the disintegration of State authority and the spread of tribal violence, with international relief aid shipments being routinely looted. One million Somalis had crossed the borders into Kenya, Ethiopia, Djibouti and Yemen, while hundreds of thousands more were displaced within Somalia, where they lived in circumstances of extreme hardship. No one could be indifferent to the enormous suffering of the Somali people, who were the victims of drought, famine and displacement rather than of persecution. The international community had a responsibility to attempt to put an end to that suffering, which deserved no less attention than the crisis in the former Yugoslavia. His delegation supported the view of the Organization of African Unity's convention on refugees that repatriation in conditions of safety was the most desired outcome, pending which temporary protection and assistance had to be provided.

35. Australia welcomed the recent lead taken by the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, who had a significant role to play in that situation. The creation of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs in the aftermath of the Gulf war, had been an acknowledgment of the need for coordinated institutional arrangements to provide emergency and humanitarian response mechanisms and for high-level political commitment to mobilizing international solidarity and addressing the root causes of the suffering.

36. While the numbers of persons in need of assistance continued to grow, the vast majority of them were not refugees within the terms of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, but displaced persons, whose predicament required qualitatively different solutions. It was clear that the humanitarian crisis facing the world could no longer be seen only in terms of the 1951 Convention and it was necessary to look beyond its provisions. In the past 12 months, the United Nations and UNHCR, in particular, had provided a new vision which recognized that reality. The value of concerted international responses could also not be overstated. The creation of the new position of Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs should further enhance the international community's ability to react swiftly and cohesively.

37. The past 12 months had confirmed Australia's view that the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees was at a crossroad in its history and that it was equal to the challenge of implementing the provisions of the 1951 Convention while rising to the other demands of a changing world. Australia commended UNHCR for its achievements and undertook to continue to assist it by maintaining a strong and responsive resettlement programme and providing financial and material assistance.

38. Mr. FAN Guoxiang (People's Republic of China) said that, despite the varying degrees of progress achieved in the political settlement of crises in

several regions, leading to the voluntary repatriation of refugees in some areas, no improvement could be detected in the ever-worsening refugee situation, which affected 18 million persons. In Asia, the persistent turbulence in some areas prevented large numbers of refugees from returning home, while, in Yugoslavia, Europe faced the most serious refugee problems since the Second World War. On repeated occasions, humanitarian relief for the dire conditions and the lack of food and medicine had been impeded. In Africa, economic backwardness had restricted countries' ability to cope with both natural disasters and conflict and the problem of refugees and displaced persons remained serious, particularly in the Horn of Africa, where 1.5 million persons in Somalia were threatened with death. The solution to that refugee problem and the prevention of new refugee flows had become matters of grave concern and a tremendous challenge to the international community. The early settlement of that problem would not only put an end to the misfortune and sufferings of the refugees, but also lighten and eliminate the economic burden borne by the countries of asylum, thus contributing to regional and global peace and stability in the interests of all countries.

39. The serious nature of the refugee problem indicated that it had become an issue whose solution went far beyond humanitarian assistance and international protection and that it was a matter closely related to the major issues of world peace and development. China had always maintained that it was imperative to combine efforts to provide humanitarian assistance with efforts to eliminate the root causes of the refugee problem, which lay in foreign aggression, armed conflict, poverty, economic stagnation and natural disasters. Efforts were required to combat racial discrimination, prevent ethnic conflict, oppose foreign invasion and uphold the principles of the peaceful settlement of disputes and respect for State sovereignty. Efforts were also required to establish a just and reasonable new international political and economic order and to help the large number of developing countries in their economic development as the only way of providing a fundamental solution to the refugee problem.

40. It was heartening to note the spirit of strengthened solidarity and burden-sharing that marked the efforts of the international community to provide generous assistance to refugees throughout the world. China had also been making its contribution, within its abilities, and it hoped that the traditional donor countries, especially those with developed economies, would increase the volume of their humanitarian assistance and intensify their efforts to bring about resettlement and find solutions to the refugee problem. It also hoped that the parties to the conflict in the former Yugoslavia would agree, in a spirit of humanitarianism, on an immediate cease-fire and provide all necessary assistance so that humanitarian relief efforts could proceed smoothly. The parties should reach a negotiated settlement to allow the refugees to return home and lead peaceful and normal lives. China supported the international community's efforts to achieve a just, reasonable and peaceful settlement to the crisis in the former Yugoslavia.

41. The majority of the world's refugees were, however, taking refuge in the developing countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America, which had to bear the

even their social stability. He urged the international community to continue to pay attention to refugee problems in those parts of the world. The unique role played by UNHCR in providing relief and protection for refugees had been illustrated by the personal visit paid by the High Commissioner to the former Yugoslavia, which had given her a first-hand understanding of the refugee situation there and led to the convening, in Geneva, of the International Meeting on Humanitarian Aid for Victims of the Conflict in the Former Yugoslavia.

42. As a State party to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, China had always regarded the Convention and its Protocol as the legal basis for the formulation of policies of refugee protection and treatment. China had always provided refugees with protection and assistance and given material and financial support for the work of UNHCR to the best of its abilities. It had so far resettled 280,000 Indo-Chinese refugees, despite its own economic difficulties, and hoped that, after the High Commissioner's recent visit to China, it would continue to receive support and assistance from the international community and UNHCR.

43. Mr. MWABULAMBO (United Republic of Tanzania) said that in her opening statement, the High Commissioner had made a number of key remarks, all of which needed serious consideration if UNHCR was to move in the right direction. With regard to voluntary repatriation, past experience and criticism had convinced his delegation of the need for a standard format and conditions to be followed by States parties in order to dispel uncertainty about who would be responsible for refugees if they returned before formal arrangements had been made and to decide whether asylum countries and UNHCR could be blamed in such circumstances for not having fulfilled their obligations. Another question was that it had to be determined who the major parties to tripartite agreements were and whether refugees' representatives could be parties in addition to countries of origin, countries of asylum and UNHCR. It might also be asked whether the conclusion of a tripartite agreement on repatriation by the three traditional parties after they had satisfied themselves that the conditions that had led to flight no longer obtained could be construed as forced repatriation. Those issues received differing interpretations and even criticism from responsible organs and his delegation would therefore like them to be further discussed so that guidelines or solutions might be found.

44. While there were some regions where expectations that 1992 would be a year of durable solutions were being fulfilled, there were others where that was not the case. The international community should not lose sight of the fact that it might have to deal with other emergencies and he called on the High Commissioner, in conjunction with the major Powers and the international community, to devise measures for the prevention of refugee flows and to try to prevent any adverse situations from developing.

45. Hopes for repatriation had remained high in Rwanda, where his Government was fully involved in peace talks, as well as in Burundi and in Mozambique, where mass repatriation was likely in the not too distant future, following the recent understanding reached by the Government of Mozambique and RENAMO.

However, the situation was worse in Somalia and in the Horn of Africa, but elsewhere on the continent the situation was unpredictable.

46. He commended UNHCR on its able response to the Somali refugees' situation, which was one of the worst in Africa today. UNHCR needed financial backing in order to discharge its responsibilities. Education and vocational training were vital aspects of the solutions that UNHCR was required to provide and they constituted a valuable durable solution. Unlike Europe's most of Africa's refugees had little education: a survey conducted among Mozambican refugees in Tanzania had shown that over 90 per cent were illiterate.

47. His delegation had doubts about the relevance of some of the ideas discussed in the Executive Committee. Although it was difficult to compare average expenditure per refugee in different parts of the world, it was time to try to ensure equity in fund disbursement for refugee care and maintenance on the basis of a standard formula similar to that used to determine refugee status. Otherwise, protection would be jeopardized, particularly in the least developed countries.

48. His delegation was also concerned about the grouping distinction which had led to the appointment of Senior Coordinators for Refugee Women and Refugee Children and which might lead to the grouping of refugees into even more different categories. The issues affecting the various groups were relative and could better be handled by asylum Governments in consultation with country representatives. UNHCR should undertake further studies to determine the overall justification for the appointment of coordinators. In her opening statement, the High Commissioner had expressed her gratitude for the generosity of donors and her recognition of UNHCR's responsibility to manage its funds as effectively as possible. She had recognized that, as operational challenges became more complex, UNHCR needed to measure the effectiveness of its programmes against clear objectives. In his delegation's view, gender issues and societal change would never be practical issues. There could be no doubt as to his delegation's respect for women's rights, but it considered that UNHCR should first perform the role expected of it.

49. The worst refugee situation in Africa's history had occurred at a time when Europe was preoccupied with the 3.5 million refugees and displaced persons in Yugoslavia and when Asia was focusing on Cambodia and Viet Nam. Increasingly apparent xenophobia made Africa's plight even more difficult and, in his delegation's view, the time had come for the High Commissioner, in conjunction with the Organization of African Unity, to convene a world conference on African refugees to draw attention to the origins of the problems faced at points of conflict, particularly since there were signs that the ex-colonial countries were defaulting, even though they owed Africa a great debt.

50. Mr. GRANIC (Croatia) thanked UNHCR and donor countries for the efforts they had made to find solutions to the humanitarian problems faced by his Government in the biggest refugee crisis in Europe since the Second World War. His country was currently providing care for 265,000 displaced persons from Croatia, for some 35,000 refugees from Serbia and for more than 450,000 refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina. The 4.7 million inhabitants of the Republic of

Croatia had thus given shelter to more than 750,000 displaced persons and refugees - a number which would be the equivalent of 10 million in a country with a population the size of that of Germany. Some 70,000 to 80,000 refugees from Croatia were still in neighbouring countries, mainly in Hungary, Germany, Switzerland, Austria and Slovenia.

51. As a result of that situation, his Government faced a number of problems. It had no more free accommodation to offer refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina who were continuing to seek asylum in the country and some 70,000 of the latter were currently living in housing inadequate for the approaching winter. Although a considerable volume of humanitarian aid in the form of food, medical supplies and clothes had been received, the cost of caring for such large numbers of displaced persons and refugees still amounted to some $100 million per month. Croatia had several times appealed to the international community to provide direct financial support, but hitherto almost none had been received.

52. The country was already facing economic difficulties as a result of the high rate of inflation, which had been estimated at more than 30 per cent during the previous month. In addition to the large number of displaced persons and refugees, it had to provide for 700,000 retired persons and 275,000 unemployed, a situation which had led to increasing social tension between the local population and the refugees. Since the Government was unable to give any direct financial support to the families which until now had been accommodating most of the refugees, it was uncertain how long such families would be able to continue to shelter them. A further cause of social tension was that it was impossible for displaced persons to return to their homes in the "pink zones" and United Nations protected areas. Slowness and inefficiency in carrying out the Cyrus Vance Plan, and the high level of destruction in the return areas were additional problems that had to be solved.

53. The constant deterioration in the economic and social situation in Croatia had forced the Government to adopt new measures for solving the ongoing refugee crisis, particularly by tightening control over the borders between the Republic of Croatia and the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, although without violating basic principles of international humanitarian law. Under those measures, exceptional cases would be considered in cooperation with UNHCR and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). A few days earlier, 16,000 ex-detainees from Trnopolje in Bosnia and Herzegovina had arrived at a temporary transit centre in Karlovac, organized by UNHCR and ICRC in cooperation with the Croatian Government. Croatia would be providing logistic and humanitarian support for the setting up of refugee camps in safety areas of Bosnia and Herzegovina for new refugees from those countries.

54. His Government was giving high priority to the return of displaced persons and refugees to their homes, primarily those from Croatia, 90 per cent of whom were from "pink zones" and United Nations protected areas. From now on, it would be pressing more urgently for increased support and cooperation from UNPROFOR and UNHCR in solving that complex problem. In the first phase, return should be organized to areas where Croats and Hungarians comprised the majority

of the population, namely to all "pink zones" and to United Nations Protected Areas (UNPA). The return should begin in the East and West sectors and continue in the North and South sectors.

55. It was expected that, as a result of the return of Croatia's own displaced persons, additional accommodation would become available for refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina who were currently inadequately housed. With regard to other refugees settled in inadequate accommodation in the country, his Government intended to ask neighbouring countries, through UNHCR, to provide suitable accommodation for the winter season.

56. Croatia was again appealing for direct financial support from the international community to enable it to meet accommodation costs - including, for example, the cost of heating oil - for foreign refugees in the country, as well as financial help for families which had given shelter to such refugees. It would not be approving plans for the building of any new refugee centres in Croatia, but would suggest that other countries should support the building of such centres or else help to rehabilitate existing housing in return areas. Projects already begun would be exceptions to that rule and he again expressed his gratitude to the Governments of Germany, Switzerland, Austria, Italy, Denmark, the Netherlands and Belgium in that regard.

57. In conclusion, he drew the attention of the entire international community to the dangerous consequences of inadequate or delayed intervention in attempting to solve the refugee crisis. Due to increasing aggression in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the influx of new refugees might very soon reach a total of 500,000. There was a great danger that increasing numbers of new asylum-seekers from Bosnia and Herzegovina, in addition to those already accommodated in Croatia, might spread throughout the whole of Europe.

58. Prince SOBANDLA (Observer for Swaziland) said that Swaziland's refugee problem was one of which the rest of the world might not be aware. His Government thanked the various United Nations agencies, and particularly UNHCR, for their help in solving it.

59. With the launching of the peace process in Mozambique, Swaziland had begun to plan the voluntary repatriation of Mozambican refugees. In a recent survey, most refugees had stated that they wished to return home as soon as possible, although those who had suffered brutal treatment in their country would need counselling before they could decide their future. Swaziland alone could not deal with that problem and would need help from international organizations, especially UNHCR. Repatriation would have to take place in the months preceding the ploughing season and, where possible, families should go straight to their areas of origin without being detained at staging posts in Mozambique. The influx of refugees from that country was continuing, with some 500 to 600 new arrivals each month. He believed that repatriation should be possible provided that there was sound planning and budgeting, particularly to meet transport costs. He looked forward to intensified cooperation with UNHCR in the near future.

60. Although there were few cases of starvation in the refugee camps, food rations were minimal and a recent UNHCR survey had shown that the refugees' nutritional state was poor. The drought had made it impossible to grow supplementary food in the camps and had also meant that there were no opportunities of temporary employment for the refugees.

61. He felt bound to point out that the influx of refugees had included a number of criminal elements, control of which had cost his country dear. Arms and drugs had been brought in and offered for sale and the resources of the police had been stretched to the limit. As a result, public opinion had turned against the refugees, making it difficult for the Government to pursue a policy dictated by concern for their welfare.

62. While his Government, together with UNHCR, had begun to prepare for the voluntary repatriation of Mozambican refugees, the repatriation exercise very much depended on the situation in Mozambique itself. The country needed peace, food and a functioning infrastructure, including educational and health facilities, but it could not provide all of those through its own efforts: help from the international community was needed.

63. Both South African and Mozambican refugees in Swaziland had been affected by the drought. In particular, the cotton harvest had been the worst for many years and the South African refugees would need financial assistance when the rains arrived.

64. In the settlements, refugee women were encouraged to become self-reliant through income-generating projects such as soap-making, knitting, sewing and crocheting. Some were being trained as health motivators and others given instruction in home economics and he appealed to UNHCR for funds to support training workshops. Both refugees camps were some distance from the main towns and the shortage of transport continued to be a problem for the staff of voluntary agencies and for Government workers.

65. Refugee children were being given instruction in English and Portuguese and new subjects had been introduced to prepare them for their eventual repatriation. However, there was a great shortage of accommodation for teachers and, as a result, it was becoming almost impossible to find staff committed enough to come to teach in the settlements. Financial support was also needed for the rehabilitation centre at the Ndzevane settlement so that assistance could be given to disabled refugees and their families.

66. The fact that a refugee problem existed was very much the result of human failure on the part of politicians and statesmen. Swaziland would be able to play its part in helping refugees only if it could rely on the continued guidance and assistance of UNHCR.

The meeting rose at 5.40 p.m.